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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000288

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SUBJECT: ACCORDING TO VALL, PRO AND ANTI-COUP PARTIES WANT AN AGREEMENT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: According to Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, political actors are ready for a consensual solution but Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz remains the main obstacle to an agreement. Vall believes the time before the election is crucial to finding a solution. Once the election takes place, he fears Mauritania will be torn by discontent and instability, which could have dangerous consequences. Vall doubts Ghazouani will stage a counter-coup and even though he stated Aziz has no support base in the military, he said Aziz has attempted to turn the military into a militia that caters to him. Vall also criticized the French and Spanish positions and asked the US to convince the AU and the EU to remain strong in their condemnation. For Vall, the Libyan mediation was extremely damaging and Mauritania's new relation with Iran is pure folly. He stated that Al Qaeda could also attempt to exploit the political crisis. End summary.

EVERYBODY WANTS AN AGREEMENT

12. (C) Charge and PolOff met April 22 with Vall at his request. He started by saying the political class agrees the current crisis is dangerous for the country. According to him, both pro and anti-coup factions are desperate for a consensual solution. Nevertheless, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz is obstructing an agreement and remains keen on moving forward unilaterally. Vall stressed that was not the case with other High State Council (HSC) members.

13. (C) Vall thinks that Mauritania will be in a dangerous position if the election takes place. The election, according to Vall, will not result in a political solution and will not afford Aziz any legitimacy. The population will reject the outcome and the situation will most likely degenerate sooner or later. The reaction, whenever it occurs, could be explosive and beyond anybody's control. Vall believes it is still possible to find a solution before the election. Internal and external pressure is needed to dissuade Aziz from holding elections. Aziz has to be isolated and his own supporters have to be pushed to ask him for consensus.

¶4. (C) Vall agreed with Charge there has been increasing collaboration between the FNDD and the RFD in spite of differences. Vall stated that maintaining a strong, united front is crucial. He believes all differences should be put aside in the interest of opposing the election and Aziz. He thinks once the crisis is solved and a minimal agreement has been reached, parties will have free reign to express their differences and follow their agendas.

¶5. (C) Vall stated he does not agree with the Constitutional Council's presidential vacancy decision. He stated the constitution is very specific about the conditions leading to a presidential vacancy and, objectively, those conditions are not reunited. For him, Ba M'Bare's mandate has no legitimacy.

¶6. (C) "Ghazouani will not attempt a coup," stated Vall with conviction. He also highlighted that Aziz has no support base within the military and that he has attempted to transform the military from an institution into a militia. Vall stressed that everything is centered around Aziz's person and all promotions go through him. The Charge asked Vall if he had done anything during the 2005-2007 transition to curtail the presidential security battalion's (BASEP) power. Vall stated 19 months was too short a time period to tackle the BASEP problem. At the time, he was focused on ensuring the military left politics; otherwise the military would have been torn apart by political forces. He told President Abdallahi this was a concern and suggested that he

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name retired Colonel Cheikh Sid Ahmed Babamine to the Ministry of Defense. Note: Colonel Babamine was an Ambassador under Taya and served as president of the CENI during the 2005-2007 democratic transition. End note. As retired military, Babamine had no power aspirations and could have restored the military to its institutional role. President Abdallahi ignored his suggestion and continued giving Aziz more power, even promoting him and others in utter disregard for military hierarchy. Comment: Depending on which conspiracy theory one ascribes to, Vall did nothing to rein in the power and influence of the BASEP during the transition since he assumed it was loyal to him. The theory holds that Vall left Aziz to mind the store for an eventual Vall political comeback. Unfortunately for Vall, Aziz decided he could keep the reins for himself and turned on Vall -- hence the current depth of Vall's discontent. End Comment

THE FRENCH, THE SPANISH, AND THE LIBYANS

¶7. (C) Vall was critical of French and Spanish positions. He said he was appalled at their tacit acceptance of the coup, particularly in light of their strong interests in Mauritania. He stressed the international community should oppose the coup because it will lead to social strife. The United States should ensure the African Union and the European Union stick to their positions.

¶8. (C) Vall brought up rumors about French complicity with Aziz. Apparently, the General has told Ghazouani and others that the French support the HSC. According to Aziz, the French encouraged him to run but stressed he needed at least another candidate to run against him, such as Ibrahima Sarr. Vall has been in touch with the French and urged them to be aware of the potential impact of their actions and their responsibility in Mauritania. "You are playing a very dangerous game," he told the French, "There are elements among you encouraging a radicalization of positions." Vall noted that the French invariably say something to buoy the regime every time they suffer a political setback.

¶9. (C) Vall is convinced that Qadhafi's mediation did

nothing but encourage Aziz. He also brought up rumors that Qadhafi and the French had struck a deal to install Aziz in power.

THE SOLUTION

¶10. (C) Regarding a solution to the crisis, Vall stated that the election should be postponed and planned in a transparent manner. Also, any future elections should be observed by the international community. Vall seemed to agree with a solution along the lines of Ould Daddah's views in which President Abdallahi would return to name a government of national unity and then resign. He said the military will never accept a solution in which Abdallahi continues governing the country until elections take place.

¶11. (C) When Charge asked if he had anyone in mind to lead the transition as prime minister, he responded immediately that Colonel Babamine would be a good candidate. Nevertheless, he agreed it would be best to draft a list of candidates and choose one consensually. As for the length of the transition, he thinks between two to four months maximum would be appropriate. (Comment: Most technical experts suggest a full-blown electoral process with international involvement would take nine to twelve months.)

AL QAEDA AND THE IRANIAN PRESENCE

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¶12. (C) Vall stated that Al Qaeda is a dangerous element in the region. Disenfranchised Mauritanian youth can be easily co-opted. Mauritania cannot fight the Al Qaeda threat on its own. Vall believes capacity has to be reinforced with the help of the West. Vall also warned Charge that Al Qaeda could exploit the political conflict.

¶13. (C) Engagement with Iran is a senseless decision, said Vall. He stated he knows first-hand the reasons that led Mauritania to expel the Iranian Ambassador in the nineties. The Iranians had organized cells and were creating the conditions for an Islamic revolution. Vall said they were even attempting to change the meaning of Islam in Mauritania. Aziz's decision shows a lack of good political judgment, stated Vall. According to Vall, if Morocco sent away the Iranians, it was for good reasons. Comment: The normally calm and collected Vall became visibly agitated when discussing the Iranians -- sputtering over his words over the threat they pose to Mauritanian security.

¶14. (C) Comment: Vall has kept a low profile through the crisis. Nevertheless, his contacts with the French and discussions with other actors show that he is getting involved from the background. It is obvious Vall does not support Aziz although we always take his democracy talking points with a very large grain of salt. He remains a significant player but one who remains in the shadows. Vall told Charge he had not taken a public position against the coup since he thought he still had the potential to influence the military leadership if the opportunity presents itself. Openly opposing the coup would cut off that access. Vall termed the June 6 elections as his "red line" after which he will come out in open dissent. End comment.
HANKINS